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ABSTRACT

A followup study collected employment data from masters and post-masters degree holders from the Department of Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development, Mississippi State University, between 1996-2000. Data from 123 questionnaires were analyzed using percentages, means, correlation statistics, analysis of variance, and multivariate analysis. Findings revealed the majority of respondents had full-time jobs; they had positive attitudes toward their jobs; 65 percent of women and 60.9 percent of men were underemployed relative to their assigned responsibilities; more men enjoyed employment benefits; level of income satisfaction differed significantly between male and female respondents; older respondents aged 52-61 were more satisfied with their jobs and income; respondents had favorable perceptions of their academic programs and agreed they were relevant to their present jobs; and multivariate analysis showed female students who earned masters degrees were more satisfied with their academic programs and income than males who earned masters and post-masters degrees. Implications were that finding a job near home was very important, so graduates should be encouraged to broaden the geographical area in which they seek employment to find jobs that match their skills and avoid skill under-utilization and that they should be encouraged to carry out self-assessment and conduct job inventories to select jobs that use their skills fully. (Contains 17 references.)(YLB)

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A Follow-up Study of Graduate Students in the Department of Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development Between 1996 - 2000

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Introduction

Follow-up studies represent an important method for collecting valuable information related to the employment status of graduates and for evaluating educational programs. Such studies also identify facts that facilitate accountability by enabling students and faculty to reflect on the university programs in terms of post-graduate employment experiences. Data generated enable educational institutions to assess how well their students compete in the economic market, and provides a data bank of information for future accountability assessments. This study was designed to collect data from graduates on issues related to job placement process, current employment status, job satisfaction, attitude toward employment, and the perceived relevance of various academic programs.

Conklin (2000) maintained that the findings of follow-up studies have provided useful information regarding the importance of occupational programs. The US Congress recognized the importance of follow-up studies in the Perkins Act of 1990 which was amended in 1992, the act stipulated, among other thing, that tech-prep programs be monitored for students' completion of the program and their job placement in the major area of training (Stecher and Hanser, 1992). One of the effective ways of monitoring programs for career placement is to conduct follow-up studies that provide information on training and subsequent employment.

Significance of the Study

Data gathered from this research could be used to improve the job placement process and to address the problems associated with the placement. As a form of accountability, the findings

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represent feedback from the product of the institution, the students; their input (feedback) can be used by professionals to foster curriculum change and to assure relevancy of programs

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to assess the employment status, job placement experiences, attitude toward employment, and the perceptions of the academic programs of graduate students from the Department of Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development, at Mississippi State University between 1996 and 2000. This time frame was selected because data for the 2001-2002 year are not yet available, and recent graduates are just now actively pursuing employment. Associations and differences among variables were identified.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the research process:

1. What percentage of graduate students who completed their program between 1996 and 2000 are engaged in full-time employment?
2. What percentage of graduates is engaged in part-time employment?
3. What percentage of graduates is unemployed?
4. What factors influenced the acceptance of the first job of graduates?
5. What is the perceived relevance of the graduates' programs in relation to the skills required on the job?
6. What is the graduate attitude toward their employment?
7. What relationship exists among satisfaction with employment and gender?
8. What relationship exists among program satisfaction and gender?
9. What relationships exist between salary satisfaction and gender?

10. What relationships exist among the perceptions of the academic programs and age?

11. What differences exist among job satisfaction based on age?

12. What differences exist in salary satisfaction based on degree level?

Theoretical Framework and the Review of Related Literature

Educational institutions routinely conduct follow-up studies to collect information from their graduates. Adams (1993) carried out a follow-up study, which provided information on the students' employment status, job satisfaction and the general perception of their program of study. One of the findings of the study revealed that 94 per cent of 1,198 students who responded to the survey stated that they would recommend the courses they took to other students, and 59% claimed that the job they did was related to the training they received from Macomb Community College (Adam, 1993). The Board of Illinois Higher Education conducted similar studies in 1997, 1998 and 1999 for the purpose of finding out students' future plans after graduation and to discover how satisfied they were with their undergraduate programs. Twelve public universities in the State of Illinois participated in the study. The information gathered was used for decision-making (State of Illinois, Board of Higher Education). Murphy (1992) maintained that follow-up studies had generated data that were used for program planning and change. Mulvey & Langer (2001) used a follow-up study to assess student's views about their physics course. The finding showed that 78% of the students had favorable opinion about their physics class, and indicated that they would be willing to take the class over again.

Follow-up studies have provided accountability on the part of the program planners because the findings of such studies indicate both the positive and the negative outcomes of the program, thereby providing justification for any change needed. Hatfield and Gorman (2000) explained that successfully completing a program of study meant acquiring skills and knowledge

required for job success. Follow-up studies have provided data to assess the success of a given educational program. In considering the general benefits of follow-up studies, Smedley and Olson (1975) pointed that they were beneficial in providing information for decision-making process. Busch (2002) has recognized the importance of follow-up studies and argued that:

> ... follow-up is valuable for two reasons. First, it provides information about how well students are doing as they transition from school to careers, where the program is finding success, and which areas need to be changed or improved. Second, it reinforces the connection between ... education and the business world as it changes and garners the support of business and industry (p. 57).

According to Ayers (1998) and Hoilste & Matthews (1993) monitoring programs through follow-up studies provided data which were used to critically assess if in-service teachers' training programs were effective in meeting the needs of the economy. The results of follow-up studies have been helpful in revealing areas of concern within a given program. For instance the evaluation of teacher preparation programs through follow-up studies have provided insight for discussions for future programs or innovation (Delaney, 1995). Follow-up studies have also proved to be useful in identifying major problems facing newly hired teachers (Delaney, 1995) and Wesley & Vocke 1992). Delaney claimed that "teaching students of different ability level, maintaining discipline and mainstreaming" (p. 12) were the three common challenges facing newly recruited teachers. Healy (2001) explained that the result of a follow-up study revealed that the 181 students surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with their counseling program. Andrew and Schwab (1993) believed that follow-up studies could influence public views concerning teaching. Kirk (1982) remarked that the National Council for Accreditation on Teacher Education (NCATE) recommended "periodic follow-up studies of graduate education program by those institutions which desired approval for their program" (p.1).

Research Procedures:

The population of this study was 207 graduate students who completed their graduate studies in the Department of Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development at Mississippi State University between 1996 and 2000. One hundred and ninety-graduates were identified from the university records. Eight students could not be located, and were not included in the study. A census population was used for the study, and the target population was the 199 graduates identified in the population frame. Two reminders were sent to potential participants, and a total of 123 of them completed and returned the questionnaire, a 65% return rate.

The questionnaire was designed after the review of relevant literature and after examining other related instruments. A panel of experts in the field of occupational survey validated the questionnaire. It was subjected to further scrutiny by asking a group of graduate students who registered for an occupational studies class to rate it for clarity, validity and precision. Cronbach alpha was used to test internal consistency. The internal consistency stood at .70.

The questionnaire covered seven different areas dealing with demographic information, employment status, employment benefits, job satisfaction, attitude toward employment, factors influencing the acceptance of first job after graduation, and the perception of academic programs. The questionnaire format was a Likert, 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument was mailed to the research subjects in February, 2001, with a letter requesting them to participate in the study. A polite letter of reminder was sent to non-respondents as a way of encouraging them to complete the questionnaire two weeks after the initial questionnaire was mailed. The researchers sent two reminder letters, each time with a

copy of the questionnaire. Telephone messages and e-mail letters were also part of the follow-up process.

The questionnaire was structured in a way that allowed the researchers to collect information from the respondents for a period covering 5 years (1996-2000). Statistical techniques for data analysis included percentages, means, correlation statistics, analysis of variance, and multivariate analysis. The alpha level for all statistical analysis was set at $p = < .05$.

Findings

The findings of this study are representative of this unique population, and should not be generalized to other populations.

Ethnic Composition of the Respondents

Not all participants indicated their race. Of those participants who indicated their race approximately 79% indicated American White in 1996, and approximately 81% indicated White American in 2000.

Table 1
Ethnic Composition of the Respondents and Year of Graduation

Ethnic Groups	1996 %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %
American White (AW)	78.95	65.00	75.86	73.91	80.65
American Blacks (AB)	00.00	10.00	00.00	13.04	03.23
American Hispanic (AH)	05.26	00.00	00.00	00.00	00.00
American Asia (AA)	05.26	00.00	06.09	04.35	03.23
No Response (NR)	10.53	25.00	17.24	08.24	12.90

Breakdown of the Degrees

The large majority of the participants, 84%, indicated that they earned a M.S. degree from the department. Approximately 7% earned doctor degrees. The distribution of degrees earned is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Breakdown of Degrees and Corresponding Rate

No. of students	Name of Graduate Degree	Per cent
5	Ph.D.	6.50
1	Ed.D.	0.81
5	Ed.S.	6.50
63	M.S. in Instructional Technology	53.66
37	M.S. in Technology	30.08
4	Other graduate degree	4.25

Employment Status of the Respondents

Ninety-three percent of the female participants and 91% of the male participants hold full-time jobs as shown in Table 3. None of the participants were unemployed; 2% of the female participants indicated that they chose not to work

Table 3
Employment Status of the Respondents

Employment Status	Males %	Females %
Full-time employment	91.30	93.00
Part-time	08.70	05.00
Does not want to work	00.00	02.00

Respondents' Gender and Year of Graduation

The gender distribution report by graduates remained relatively consistent over the years covered in the study: approximately 85% females and 15% males as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Gender of the Research Subjects, Rate of Response and Year of Graduation

Sex	1966	1997	1998	1999	2000
Female	84.21 %	80.00%	79.31%	78.26%	84.38%
Male	15.79%	20.00%	20.69%	21.74%	15.63%

MSU Career Placement Assistance

As shown in Table 5, only 4% of the male participants and 5% of the female participants reported using the services of the Mississippi State University Job Placement Center. These figures remained relatively stable over the five years represented in this study. A large majority, 57% of the males and 60% of the females did not seek assistance of the Job Placement Center.

Table 5
MSU Career Placement Assistance by Gender

MSU Job Placement Assistance	Male %	Female %
MSU Job Place Center helped find a job after graduation	05.00	04.00
MSU Job Placement Center did not help me find a job	17.39	13.00
I did not seek the job placement assistance from MSU Job Placement Center	56.52	60.00
Finding my first job following graduation was easy	26.09	20.00
Finding my first job after graduation was not easy	08.00	10.00

Sources Graduates used to Locate Jobs

Fifty-seven percent of the male participants and 49% of the female participants located their jobs through personal contacts. As shown in Table 6, 41% of the female participants indicated they located their job by "walk in."

Table 6
Sources of Job Placement by Gender

Sources of Job Placement	Male %	Female %
Personal Contact	56.52	49.00
MSU Career Placement Center	4.35	1.00
Employment Agency	0.00	3.00
Flyers and Posters	0.00	4.00
Job Fair	0.00	2.00
Newspaper Advertisement	4.35	3.00
Trade Magazine	0.00	0.00
Cooperative Services	0.00	0.00
Computer Network	0.00	0.00
Walk-in	4.35.	41.00
Others (unspecified)	34.78	1.00
No Response (NR)	0.00	2.00

Job Classification of the Respondents

As shown in Table 7, the majority of the male participants, 43%, reported working as consultants; the majority of the female participants, 39%, reported working as high school teachers.

Table 7
Job Classification of Respondents

Job Classification	Male %	Female %
University professor	4.35	00.00
Community college professor	0.00	11.00
High school instructor	21.74	39.00
Elementary school teacher	8.70	7.00
Administrator	4.35	5.00
Supervisor/Manager	0.00	5.00
Computer Scientist	4.35	0.00
Consultants	43.48	3.00
Others	17.39	27.00
No Response (NR)	4.35	2.00

Classification of the Respondents' Primary Employment

Although most of the respondents indicated that they worked for educational institutions, as shown in Table 8, only 26% of the male participants and 55% of the female graduates indicated that they were working in a teaching in elementary/high school as shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Classification of Respondents' Primary Employment

	Male %	Female %
College or university	34.78	29.00
Elementary/secondary school	26.09	55.00
Federal/state/local govt.	0.00	1.00
Armed Forces	4.35	0.00
Professional firm (e.g. Engineering, law)	0.00	1.00
Business (industrial, Commercial or service)	13.04	6.00
Health agencies (hospitals, medical, clinics, nursing homes,	0.00	1.00
Private Practices	0.00	1.00
Other	8.70	1.00

Salary Range

Most of the graduates indicated making less than $40,000 a year as show in Table 9. Salary levels have increased slightly over the five years examined in this research.

Table 9
Respondents' Salary Range

Salary Range	1996 %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %
$19,999 or less	0.81	0.00	0.00	1.63	0.00
$20,000 - $24,999	0.81	6.50	3.25	3.25	4.07
$25,000 - $29,999	7.32	4.88	9.76	7.32	10.57
$30,000 - $34,999	1.63	2.44	3.25	0.81	3.25
$35,000 - $39,999	0.81	0.81	1.63	0.81	0.00
$40,000 - $44,999	1.63	0.00	0.00	0.81	1.63
$45,000 - $49,999	1.63	0.00	0.00	0.81	0.00
$50,000 - $54,999	0.00	0.00	2.44	0.81	0.81
$55,000 - $59,999	0.81	0.00	0.00	0.81	0.00
$60,000 - $64,999	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
$65,000 - $69,999	0.00	0.00	0.81	0.00	0.00
$70,000 and above	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

2.44% of the Respondents did not provide salary range information

Employment Benefits

As shown in Table 10, both male and female graduates reported receiving the same type of benefits. One noticeable difference is in the area of Incentive for Hard Work; more men (21.74%) than women (6%) received incentive for hard work. Also more men (26.09) received financial support for further education than women (15%). As shown in Table 10, 87 % of the female participants and 69.57% of their male counterparts reported receiving Sick Days. Ninety-three percent of female participants and 52.17% of male participants indicated that they were receiving Personal Day benefit.

Table 10
Employment Benefits by Gender

Employment Benefits	Female	Male
Medical health insurance	90.00%	86.96%
Dental insurance	20.00%	34.78%
Eye treatment insurance	8.00%	17.39%
Retirement pension plan	83.00%	82.61%
Incentive for hard work	6.00%	21.74%
Yearly pay raise	33.00%	30.40%
Encouraging of in-house hiring	12.00%	17.39%
Encouraging staff development projects	47.00%	30.43%
Finances employees. Education	15.00%	26.09%
Provides vacation pay	4.00%	13.04%
Provides Christmas bonus	4.00%	13.04%
Provides sick days	87.00%	69.57%
Provides personal days	93.00%	52.17%
Others	7.00%	8.70%

Attitude Toward Employment

Most of the graduates indicated in increasing numbers each year that they believed their jobs were exciting, 78%, Table 11. The participants also indicated in increasing numbers that they felt like quitting their job, 28%, and that their job did not offer opportunity for upward economic mobility.

Table 11
Attitude Toward Job By Year of Graduation

Items	1996 %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %
My job is exciting	52.63	35.00	55.17	39.13	78.26
My job is challenging	84.21	80.00	82.76	73.91	81.25
I dislike my job	00.00	0.5.00	03.45	00.00	06.25
My job is interesting	78.95	50.00	51.72	65.22	56.26
My job is boring	05.26	05.00	00.00	00.00	03.13
My job affords me the opportunity to be creative	63.16	70.00	72.41	52.17	59.38
I learn new information from my job	63.16	75.00	82.76	56.26	72.88
I feel quitting my job	00.00	15.00	03.45	08.70	28.13
Opportunity for promotion exists in my job	26.32	15.00	20.69	21.74	15.63
My job is dull	00.00	05.00	00.00	00.00	03.13
My job is repetitive	00.00	15.00	06.90	04.35	06.25
My job is stressful	52.63	65.00	27.59	56.23	46.88
My job does not offer opportunity for upward economic mobility	10.53	15.00	13.79	34.78	28.13
Others (not specify)	00.00	10.00	03.45	04.35	03.01

Adequate Skill Utilization

More women (74%) felt that their skills were adequately utilized than men (52%). Also more women (65%) indicated that they were underemployed than the men (60%) relative to their assigned responsibilities as shown in Table 12.

Table 12
Skill Utilization

	Female			**Male**		
	Adequate	Not Adeqt	Not Sure	Adequate	Not Adeqt	Not Sure
Skill utilization	74%	24%	2%	52%	43%	4%
Under employed	27%	65%	8%	34%	60%	4%

Factors Influencing the Acceptance of First Job after Graduation

More than half of the graduates indicated that their skill level (52%) was of very high importance in their accepting their first job (Table 13). Thirty percent (30%) also considered nearness of job location to be of very high importance in their decision to accept their first job after graduation

Table 13
Factors Influencing the Accepting First Job After Graduation

Items	Very Low Important 1	Low Important 2	High Important 3	Very High Important 4
Likelihood of immediate promotion	25.20%	22.76%	17.07%	04.07%
I have the skill needed for the job	0.81%	04.07%	22.76%	52.03%
Urgent economic necessity	11.38%	21.98%	20.33%	19.51%
Nearness of job location	08.94%	10.57%	29.27%	30.08%

Perceived Relevance of the Academic Program

Overall, on a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree, the participants indicated a positive perception of their academic program with a mean score slightly over 4.0, Table 14. The negative questionnaire items were converted to positive items to enable the researchers carry out meaningful statistical computation. The graduates indicated that they acquired marketable skill with a rating of 5, and that they had a sound background related to computer software with a rating of 5.

Table 14
Mean Rating of the Perceived Relevance of Academic Program

No	Items	Mean Score
1.	I acquired marketable knowledge and skills	5
2.	My skills are not applicable to my present job	2
3.	I have the opportunity to develop useful ideas	4
4.	The knowledge I have acquired is narrow	2
5.	The knowledge I have acquired is useful for a productive life	4
6.	I have acquired the ability to communicate effectively	4
7.	I have not acquired the skill to analyze advance written materials	2
8.	The knowledge I gained from the classroom is easily transferred to the work environment	4
9.	My knowledge of the research process is sound	4
10.	My knowledge of research process is minimal	2
11.	I have the opportunity to discover knowledge	4
12.	My knowledge of computer software application is sound	5
13.	My knowledge of computer hardware has improved	4
14.	My general knowledge of computer is excellent	4
15.	I have not developed leadership skills	2
16.	My problem-solving skills have improved	4
17.	My interpersonal skills have not improved	2
18.	I have developed the ability to discern the relationship between knowledge	4
19.	I have learned to accept people with different views and beliefs	4
20.	I have not learned to work with the diverse population	2
21.	I have confidence in myself	4
22.	I have not developed appreciation for group (team) work	2
23.	I have learned to put more energy in my work	4
24.	I have time management skills	4
25.	I have not discovered the need to become a lifelong learner	2
26.	I like my educational program	4
27.	My highest degree is important to my present job	4
28.	If I have the opportunity, I would change my major/specialization	2
29.	I will recommend for a redesign of my educational program	2
30.	I am satisfied with the mentoring I received during my graduate study	4
31.	Overall, I am satisfied with my program of study.	4

Relationship Between Variables

As shown in Table 15, there was a substantial association between income and gender; female respondents were more satisfied with their salaries than their male counterparts ($r = .64$, $p. < 05$). A substantial positive correlation existed between income and degree ($r = .76$, $p < .05$). Master's degree holders were more satisfied with their income than post master's degree holders.

Table 15
Correlation Between Income and Other Variables

Other Variables	Correlation	Significance Level
Gender	.636	.05
Degree	.756	.05

Gender and Other Variables

There was a substantial correlation between gender and program satisfaction ($r = .76$, $p. < .05$) (Table 16). Female respondents were more satisfied with their program than their male counterparts. The substantial association between gender and unemployment indicated that more women believed that were underemployed than their male counterparts ($r = .68$, $p < .05$) (Table 16). The association between gender and the desire to change academic program, indicated that more male respondents wanted their academic program to be changed than the female respondents ($r = .47$, $p < .05$) (Table 16).

Table 16
Correlation Between Gender and other variables

Other Variables	Correlation	Significance Level
Program satisfaction	.756	.05
Attitude toward employment	.676	.05
Desire to Change Program	.469	.05

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Tests

An ANOVA was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the way female and male respondents perceived their programs of study. The results show that the female graduates were significantly more satisfied with their program with a mean score of 4.6 compared with the male graduates with a mean of 3.08 (Table 17).

Table 17
Gender Difference in Program Satisfaction

Source (Gender)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Male	23	3.08	108.307	.05
Female	99	4.62		

Female respondents had a mean score of 4.21 and were more satisfied with their salary than the male respondents who had a mean score of 1.86. The result of the F test showed that there was a significant difference in the level of satisfaction associated with salary between male and female graduates as indicated on Table 18.

Table 18
Gender Difference in Salary Satisfaction

Source (Gender)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Male	23	1.86	40.137	.05
Female	97	4.21		

Satisfaction By Age

Older graduates were significantly more satisfied with their salary, job, and programs of study that younger graduates. The results revealed a progressively higher satisfaction with salary as age increased. There was no significant difference in income satisfaction among age groups A, B and C. However, there was a significant difference in income satisfaction among age group D (older respondents) and the younger respondents (age groups A, B. and C) at p. < .05.

Table 19
Differences in Income Satisfaction based on Age

Source (Age Groups)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Group A (22-21 years)	39	2.53	31.264	.01
Group B (32-41 years)	23	3.00		
Group C (42-51 years)	43	4.76		
Group D (52-61 years)	8	8.50		

The younger respondents, (group A) were less satisfied with their programs of study as shown in Table 20 than any other age category. There was no significant difference in program satisfaction among age groups A, B and C. However, there was a significant difference in program satisfaction among group D (older respondents) and the younger respondents (age groups A, B. and C) at p. < .05.

Table 20
Difference in Program Satisfaction based on Age

Source (Age Groups)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Group A (22-21 years)	39	3.87	176.295	.05
Group B (32-41 years)	23	4.39		
Group C (42-51 years)	43	5.00		
Group D (52-61 years)	10	5.00		

Older respondents were significantly more satisfied with their job as shown on Table 21. that any other age group. There was no significant difference in job satisfaction among age groups A, B and C. However, there was a significant difference in job satisfaction among age group D (older respondents) and the younger respondents (age groups A, B. and C) at p. < .05

Table 21
Differences in Job Satisfaction based on Age

Source (Age Group)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Group A (22-21 years)	39	1.00	29.627	.05
Group B (32-41 years)	23	1.00		
Group C (42-51 years)	43	1.00		
Group D (52-61 years)	11	2.36		

Degree Earned and Program Satisfaction

Those graduates holding master's degrees with a mean score of 4.57 were more satisfied with their program of study than post-master's degree holders with a mean of 2.60. There was a statistical significant difference between master's degree holders and post-master's degree holders in the level of their satisfaction with their academic program at p. < .05 as shown in Table 22.

Table 22
Differences in Program Satisfaction based Degree

Source (Degree)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Master	107	4.57	148.425	.05
Post-master	15	2.60		

The master's degree holders with a mean score of 4.04 were more satisfied with their salary than the post-master's degree holders who had a mean score of 1.80. There was statistically significant difference in the level of satisfaction with income between master's and post-master's degree holders at p. <.05 (Table 23).

Table 23
Salary satisfaction based on Degree

Source (Degree)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
Master	107	4.57	23.205	.05
Post-master	15	2.60		

Program Satisfaction Based on Year of Graduation

The participants who graduated in 1999 and 2000 with mean scores 5.00 and 5.00 were more satisfied with their programs of study than those who completed their program prior to 1999. The F tests revealed a statistical significant difference in the levels of satisfaction between students who graduated in 1999 and 2000 and those who graduated prior to 1999 (Table 24).

There were no statistically significant differences in level of salary satisfaction based on the year of graduation.

Table 24
Program satisfaction based on Year of Graduation

Source (Year of Graduation)	N	Mean	F	Prob > F
1996	19	2.89	55.209	.05
1997	20	4.00		
1998	29	2.27		
1999	23	5.00		
2000	31	5.00		

Discussions and Conclusions

The majority of the graduates indicated that they had full time jobs, and most agreed that their jobs were interesting, exciting and challenging. The finding supported the follow-up study conducted by Conklin (1993) that revealed that the respondents in her study "…exhibited positive attitude toward their job" (p.6).

A large majority of the participants in this study did not receive any assistance from the Mississippi State University (MSU) Career Placement Center in their efforts to seek employment, and most did not seek job placement assistance from the center. Most respondents reported limited use of any resources in their search for jobs, but only a few indicated that the "job search process" was difficult. More male participants than female participants indicated that searching for their first job following graduation was easy. Personal contact was the most common source the respondents used to locate jobs.

The most common jobs held by graduates included: consultants, high school teachers, and elementary school teachers. A large majority of the respondents worked in educational institutions, and earned an income ranging from $20,000 to $39,999.

Both male and female participants received basically the same company benefits, but men reported receiving more benefits. More than half of the respondents agreed that the most important factor they considered in accepting their jobs was the possession of the skills demanded by those jobs. More women than men felt that their skills were adequately utilized; also more women indicated that they were underemployed relative to their assigned responsibilities.

The graduates had a positive perception of their academic program and agreed that their various programs of study were relevant to their present jobs and that they felt confident in their ability to complete required tasks on the job. Sheldon (1981) found that the students he surveyed showed similar positive attitude toward their program of study; they believed that their studies were relevant to their job. Vice & Carness (2002) and Pearce & Hess (1999) argued that when assessment was included into the teaching process, it would provide accountability to the students and to the learning establishments. In the present study, the respondents had expressed concerns regarding aspects of their program. They agreed that the knowledge they have acquired from their programs of study was limited in some areas, and recommend change in their academic program. They also agreed that they would like to change their majors or areas of specialization if they had the opportunity to do so.

Females who earned master's degree were significantly more satisfied with their academic program and their current salary than the male respondents who earned master's degree or post-master's degrees

Implications and Recommendations

Only limited change in terms of diversity as related to race (79% Caucasian in 1996; 81% Caucasian in 2000) and gender (84% female in 1996 and 84% female in 2000) was indicated by

the graduates during this five-year period. It is hoped that the department's efforts to target diversity issues as related to students, staff, and faculty will be reflected the next follow study to be conducted in 2003.

Only 4% of the respondents sought job placement assistances from the Mississippi State University Career Placement Center. Students might not be aware of the services provided by Mississippi State University Job Placement Center, and it is recommended that the center reach out and encourage graduating students to take advantage of the services provided. Most of the respondents reported using personal contacts and other unspecified sources to locate jobs; they have not fully explored other sources. This might help account for the fact that many respondents felt they were underemployed; they considered quitting their jobs, and they were not satisfied with their salaries. Since many graduates reported accepting jobs recommended by personnel contacts rather than seeking out jobs that matched their qualifications these facts might contribute to any negative aspects they report related to their current job. The respondents should be encouraged to widen the sources of their job search.

Most of the graduates reported working as consultants and teachers, and the large majority work in educational institutions. Finding a job near their home was important to many of the respondents. Both male and female respondents received basically the same benefits, but males reported receiving more benefits and incentives. Graduates should be encourage to broaden the geographical area in which they seek employment to find a job that matches their skill.

Generally, female participants were more satisfied with their university programs than males, and female participants were more satisfied with their salary than males. However, more women than men felt that they were underemployed. Older graduates, in general, were more

satisfied with their university program, their current job, and their current salary than younger graduates. Graduates who held master degrees were more satisfied with their university program, their current job, and their current salary than those graduates with post-master degrees. It might be that older graduates hold higher-level positions and thus earn a higher salary than younger graduates so they tend to see more relevance to their university programs. Students with post-master degrees might report being less satisfied with their current job, salary, and university program because the current business economy is limiting the incentives expected with earning advance degrees.

Many of the graduates reported that they worked as consultants; the curriculum includes little content that addresses this issue. The department should consider this finding when assessing and changing curriculum. Future studies should also be conducted to explore the issue of underemployment. Is underemployment a curriculum issue, a job placement issue, a personal choice issue? Students should be encouraged to carry out "self-assessments" and "job inventories" in order to secure positions that enable them to use their skill levels to the fullest. They should also be encouraged to utilize the services of the Mississippi State University Career Placement Center and those individuals with expertise who can assist them in securing jobs that match their professional qualifications.

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